

Oh no! After I Reincarnated, My Moms Became Son-cons!

vol.7.5 – Cherry Tomatoes at Sixteen Years
Old

by 川香麻辣鸡肉锅

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [Lord Obsidian](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

Ch. 01

The post of an attendant could be considered a humble or a glorious post.

Actually, whether or not the post is humble has nothing to do with the individual or the environment the individual came from. It should be seen as a position that the holder has no say in. Try as they may, nobody will change their view even if you struggle with all of your might. Nothing will change.

The attendant post is conferred upon the individual by their master,

That means that Castell's rank should be very high, as he was to be the ruler of the empire's attendant. This empire has only been established for one year. As the palace had been renovated, the smell of dye still lingered around. The large and sturdy buildings looked as though they suddenly sprouted out of the ground. In the eyes of the people of Hilles City, the construction of the palace was somewhat abrupt.

The young man had a thin and small physique comparable a flame flickering in the wind as though he would fall over at any moment. He raised his pale face up and looked. He froze up when he saw the large golden letters above the door of the Royal Palace. The old servant led him by his hand and told him all sorts of details about looking after Her Majesty, such as what to do and what not to do. It didn't look as if Castell minded.

"Long live Your Majesty."

That was the only phrase Castell paid attention to that day, which became the phrase he said most, as well as the phrase he forever believed in.

It must've been a long time ago by now. Castell entered the palace at a young age. It's been at least over a decade ago, right? Castell still remembers that spring day, the spring day in Hilles City. The blue, spring sky was calm as the ocean. The air on that spring day carried a faint scent of flowers. White petals floated all over the sky similarly to a torrential rain.

Castell still remembers that time and the feeling of the white cotton that landed on his face.

“All right, all right, stop here for a bit. Valkyries, please stay calm. This is the next personal attendant Her Majesty asked for. His name is Castell.”

He had arrived outside a palace with the old servant. Castell looked at the young girls who had their swords at his neck with his lifeless gaze. The eyes of the young girls burnt with an intense flame as though they would cut him down if he dared to take one more step closer. However, Castell wasn't afraid. He looked at the sword before him, but his eyes didn't budge. It was as though he was just seeing a butterfly spread its wings, a meaningless scene to behold.

Castell didn't care, because he had gone through experiences more frightening than death. While in the prison, he experienced pain that felt akin to being torn. The pain led him to wish to be granted death countless times already. From his perspective, death wasn't a form of punishment, but a release. If it wasn't for Her Majesty, he might've rotted in that stinky prison.

The Valkyries took their swords back. Castell crossed through the long corridor and reached the interior of the palace. He crossed the long corridor. His footsteps echoed similarly to a clock in the lonely corridor. It was as if his footsteps were counting the young man's long years of life.

Outside the windows, white cotton filled the sky. The sun was high up in the sky while the clear breeze whispered a melody as though it was heaven outside.

“Up ahead is Her Majesty's private room for receiving guests. I will not be entering. You need to personally see Her Majesty. You just need to earnestly answer Her Majesty's questions.”

“Understood.”

Castell's vocal chords shook, causing a muffled sound to come out from his mouth. The old servant knocked on the door and then courteously pushed it open. Castell entered the room and then the old servant gently shut the door.

There was nothing strange inside the private guest room. There was only one chair, one small desk. To another side was an additional small concave hole with a black veil on top to cover it. Castell could only see a pair of legs with one over the other. The tips of one foot swayed back and forth. The slender legs and toes that were gently flexed toward her shin hooked the young man's heart.

“Castell, right?”

The individual behind the black veil noticed Castell’s arrival. She put one leg over the other and then stopped. Her voice was similar to a clear breeze, blowing away the dense clouds looming over his heart.

Castell slightly lowered his head and quivered a little as he replied, “Yes, Your Majesty.”

“You don’t have to be so uptight.” The Empress shifted around, then switched her legs, smiled and continued, “You’ll be my personal attendant from now on. Though I trust my old servant, Yate, very much, he can’t continue staying by my side due to his age and health. Therefore, Castell, you will be my fourth personal attendant from now. Make sure to do your job properly.”

“I understand, Your Majesty.”

“Yeah? It looks like you’ve learnt a fair bit recently.” The Empress seemed to be very interested in him; or rather, she was very interested in his work that was to come. However, she seemed to be doing something inside. She kept pausing as she spoke, “I’m very relieved to see your efforts. It looks like you’re not the type I used to meet. I’m very relieved to see your performance. You escaped from danger, and yet, were still able to handle such high difficulty work and training.”

“Everything was done for you, Your Majesty. You saved me. I will repay your kindness even if I must repay it with my life, Your Majesty!”

“Don’t say that, Castell.” Her Majesty didn’t seem interested in that response of his. As the Empress, she doesn’t lack warriors who’d be willing to die for her. There are countless who would exchanged their lives for loyalty. She paused again. Then she seemed to swallow something before continuing, “Dead people are useless to me. You’re my personal attendant, not my bodyguard. What am I going to do with a dead personal attendant? What I need is a well-organised personal attendant who can take care of my living needs by my side. If I need someone to die for me, I can just ask the Valkyries. Castell, keep your life and use it to take care of me properly. That’s how you repay me.”

“Understood.”

Castell paused for a bit. He then looked behind the black veil and earnestly went on, “I will definitely do my best. It is just that... that... I do not have any experience. If I fail to do well, you can deal with me as you see fit, Your Majesty, I will not complain!”

“If I treat you however I please, then how am I any different to those who abused you? Wouldn’t that mean I saved you for no reason? Although I do kill people, I don’t kill people for no reason, unless I’m really unhappy. Castell, if you make me that upset, I will kill you. Therefore, you need to work properly, Castell. Hmm... Go and see your resting place first. Ah, right...”

The meeting appeared to be over now, but it seemed that the Empress still had something to say. Castell sat far in the distance and didn’t move. The black veil lifted up as though the wind blew it, bringing in the sunlight and warmth. The sixteen year old boy’s spring day’s flood of white cotton and sweet wind was revealed. The gloomy day had finally been pierced by the sunlight. In that moment, Castell felt that he had left the dark prison for the first time and spaced out at the sight of the sun.

The Empress pulled open the veil with a smile. Castell looked at her beautiful face that was warmer and brighter than the very sun, so warm and bright that it would take one’s breath away. It was as though the Empress froze time in that instant. The young man’s heart felt as though it was frozen in that moment. It was the first time he felt the power of beauty.

“Have it.”

The Empress extended her hand out to him. He took it with a blank look. It turned out that the empress was secretly eating cherry tomatoes behind the black veil. It was a berry that resembled a peach exactly. The Empress had half. The remaining half shined brightly under the sun as though it carried with it the scent on her tender lips.

“Thank you, Your Majesty...”

The spring day when he was sixteen years old was filled with white cotton as if it was a day with lots of snowfall. The sun was bright to the point it felt surreal. The clear breeze blew over the vast plains, bringing along with it a sweet, fragrant breath it collected along the way...

The young man could remember his reward at the age of sixteen. He could remember the gentle sourness wrapped inside that soft sweetness.

Ch. 02

The Empress likes to kill people too. To be fair, the Empress was the same as his “master.” The both of them didn’t feel that there was anything wrong with killing people or torturing people, and in fact, enjoyed it. He felt as though he was back in the past when he saw the Empress’s shimmering face in the dungeon; but nonetheless, Castell felt that the Empress was still breathtakingly beautiful

In fact, he felt that the Empress holding a barbed-whip looked even more beautiful than when she gave him cherry tomatoes. Maybe some women needed blood to look more beautiful.

Although the Empress liked to kill and torture people, she wasn’t the type that would just kill because she felt like it. There were reasons she killed and tortured them. That was one thing that made her completely different to his previous “master.” The Empress’s life was very simple, as well. She didn’t have a husband. She went to sleep alone every night. None of the things in the past happened.

The young man quickly adapted to his new life. He woke up as soon as the sun was up. He would pick up the Empress’s clothes from the court lady and then go to the kitchen to pick up the Empress’s breakfast. He tested every dish to ensure the food wasn’t poisoned before taking the tray of food to Her Majesty’s door. He would then wake her up... or rather, see Her Majesty already awake, and then help her get changed and have breakfast.

Perhaps the Empress had never realised how seductive her body was. Her perfect body made her resemble a holy goddess under the early morning sun’s rays. Despite her having some scars, they didn’t reduce her beauty. To the contrary, they added an element of wild beauty. Castell felt his heart beat wildly every morning. The Empress, however, didn’t notice any of that and continued to get dressed in front of the young man.

She didn’t see the young man as a man.

During breakfast, the Empress looks over some of the items on the agenda for

the conference for the day. Then she heads to the conference chamber to hear what the vassals have to say before making the final decision. Around lunch, Castell has to go the kitchen to inspect the dishes, in addition to notifying the kitchen if there are any banquets in the evening. He then takes the Empress's lunch to her desk. Then he takes her clothes from yesterday and her sleepwear from last night to the laundry. He then has to arrange for the maids to go clean and tidy the Empress' room. Next, he goes for a stroll in the flower garden with the Empress or they'll see guests in the guest hall. In the evening, he takes dinner to the Empress and confirms the menu for tomorrow. He'll then deliver the Empress's sleepwear and sleep medication to her. After reading books, the Empress goes to sleep.

Then he can turn in before waking up to begin the next day's work.

Life in the palace could be considered dull. However, for the young man who always had the Empress by his side, he could see her frowns and smiles. In the past, he couldn't raise his head up to look at such a beautiful and venerable woman, but now he got to take care of her daily necessities at her side. For Castell, that was the most blissful thing in the world, as well as his hope for living on.

The Empress rescued him and gave him a purpose to live. As such, taking care of Her Majesty was his only purpose in life.

That was his life.

Do people complain about living their own life?

He didn't completely understand Her Majesty. He was merely her personal attendant. He didn't completely know her. He knew what she liked to eat, that she liked to kill people and her little habits, but he didn't know any more.

Does she have a husband? Does she have children?

Her Majesty should be very young, but she doesn't have a husband with her nor does she get close to any men. No men were permitted entry into the inner court even if they had urgent business. In front of the inner court was an outer court. Nobody resided in the outer court. There was just one room, yet there were people looking after the outer court as done with the inner court. There was also a palace for resting there.

Was Her Majesty keeping it for somebody to live in?

He wasn't sure. Nobody had ever entered the outer court yet it was cleaned and tidied every day. That was Her Majesty's order. It was as though she was waiting for somebody to return.

When she had free time, Her Majesty liked to look to the North and space out. In her eyes would be sadness and eagerness. She seemed to really want to go to the North. The map of the North of the empire had appeared on her desk more than once. She even made lots of marks on it, but never did she go there.

He didn't understand everything about the Empress. Castell was aware that he couldn't ask, either. He was just a mere personal attendant. His only job was to take care of Her Majesty. As for that sort of stuff..., it had nothing to do with him.

He did get along quite well with the Empress's personal bodyguard, though. Alice was a personal bodyguard whose physique didn't match her age. Though she was cute, she was the same age as Her Majesty and possessed monstrous god-like strength. She was also the captain of the Valkyries. Come to think of it, he strangely had a good relationship with the group.

His life and their lives belonged to Her Majesty.

Hence, they were the same as him. People of the same kind resonated with each other and formed a close bond. While he had nothing to do with the Valkyries, they treated him with courtesy.

"Your Majesty, do you have family members?"

His hand jolted, causing him to nearly spill the wine. He looked at the politician who was a little tipsy. He had no idea who the politician was, but he asked the Empress that question right in front of her.

The Empress smiled then shook her cup of wine a few times. The dark red wine inside gently swished. The Empress looked at his face and faintly replied, "I do."

"So you are married?"

"That has nothing to do with you right, King Bagrott?" The Empress titled her

head a little and then calmly explained, “I have indeed gotten married, and I’m still his wife. I also have a cute child. That’s nothing for me to be embarrassed about. In my opinion, it’s something worth bragging about. My family and my child are both worth bragging about.”

The Empress handed Castell her now empty cup, but his hand and body felt powerless for some reason.

Clang!

Both of them looked toward him right away. Castell blankly looked at the broken cup of wine on the ground and the wine running down the pure-white tablecloth, not knowing what to do.

Everybody looked toward him. He went and broke Her Majesty’s cup at a national banquet when he was her personal attendant.

“Your Majesty...”

His legs felt powerless as he bent over at the waist. He knelt on the ground and quickly tried to sweep up the broken bits of glass into his hand. A sharp piece stabbed into his palm and he began to bleed. The pain and fear enveloped his entire body.

“It’s fine. Get someone to tidy up. Castell, you go and have a rest. Bandage your hand. Have an early night tonight.”

A warm and fragrant scent released itself onto his head. She gently pulled him up with one hand. He looked up, and his eyes met with the Empress’s gentle and deep eyes. The Empress stroked his face, causing him to feel as if a freezing cold breeze brushed all of his nerves.

A faint agonising feeling brushed the corner of his mouth as the Empress ran her finger with wine on it across his lips, leaving a faint mellow fragrance.....

‘So Her Majesty is already married...’

‘But... that should...’

‘She must be...’

Ch. 03

Her Majesty had a puppy. At least she did back then.

He didn't know when the puppy started accompanying Her Majesty but it wasn't any expensive or brand item. It was the most ordinary type of dog with mixed fur colours. However, he was Her Majesty's favourite puppy. As a matter of fact, Her Majesty liked her dog more than human beings.

The puppy was very small and very clingy toward Her Majesty. However, the puppy slept in the resting room of the Valkyries at the entrance of the inner court. It ran around in the palace asserting its dominance. Due to Her Majesty loving him, nobody dared to say anything. He even dared to go to the kitchen to steal the Empress's food for the next day. The chefs couldn't let him eat Her Majesty's meat, but at the same time they couldn't hit him. so they had to call for Castell whenever it ran in there.

For some reason, the dog was very close to Castell. All Castell had to do was tell him to leave, and he would leave. Maybe it understood that Castell was Her Majesty's personal attendant, so he trusted the young man. Castell always picked him up and brought him to Her Majesty.

Her Majesty is very generous; more precisely, she had no interest in normal tributes. If the things other nations sent her couldn't fit in the warehouse, she would generously gift it to those around her. A few days ago, the lord of Karnashun sent her a head cloth and silk from the desert. After taking some for herself, she gave the remainder to the court ladies that served her.

Castell didn't get any, but that's probably because Her Majesty felt that guys didn't need that sort of stuff. Castell really wanted it, despite it not being something he needed, as it was a reward from her. He viewed anything she rewarded him as his most important things, as it was an indication that she acknowledged his work.

But nevertheless, she had never given him anything other than the cherry tomatoes when they met.

Whatever the case, though, he still had to complete his jobs. As long as he

performed his jobs well, she would surely reward him. She will for sure.

That was how Castell comforted himself. When he got up from his bed and looked at the sun that had just come up outside, he cheered himself on before heading to the inner court after getting dressed. When he just got to the entrance of the inner court, however, he felt the atmosphere was a very different today. Usually, there are two Valkyries on guard duty here, while the other Valkyries behind them were hidden.

Now, however, there were lots of Valkyries at the entrance of the inner court. They all exuded murderous intent and a type of hatred as though they were teased. He vigilantly checked his surroundings. After a few minutes, another fully equipped Valkyrie group came over on patrol. There were so many of them that it was as though somebody were attempting to assassinate the Empress.

Castell felt a little nervous, so he quickly headed to the Empress's bedroom only to find her talking to Alice about something.

The Empress sat on her chair with her usual one-leg-over-the-other posture and looked at Alice as she sternly said, "Yeah, the maids and court ladies lost their stuff. They lost a good number of things, actually. Even I have lost some things. How audacious."

"I apologise, Your Majesty, it was our fault. To let somebody steal something under our watch as your bodyguards, I am very sorry. Your Majesty, we will definitely find the perpetrator in the shortest time frame possible and skin him alive before you."

Alice's voice contained hatred and murderous intent as she angrily spoke. Her two hands shook as though she just wanted to rip the perpetrator apart and eat him. That was indeed the most outrageous way to challenge the Valkyries. They put in every stop to protect the inner court, yet somebody was able to steal, nonetheless. That was basically the equivalent of smacking the Valkyries' captain across the face.

"Your Majesty..."

"Ah, Castell."

The Empress looked at him then smiled and asked, "Castell, did you lose

anything?”

Castell stopped to think and then replied, “No. I did not lose anything. Your Majesty, did you lose something?”

“Uhm” The Empress looked at him and nodded. She then hesitated for a moment and said, “The court ladies and maids lost a fair number of things, which were all things I gave them. My gloves and the head cloths I rewarded them have all gone missing.”

“That...”

Castell’s first reaction was actually “a creep.”

‘Apparently, there’s someone who enjoys stealing female clothing. But on second thought, this is the inner court. Usually, nobody is allowed to approach it let alone enter. This is the place the Valkyries guard. The Valkyries wouldn’t accept any bribes let alone slack on their duty. How skilled must this thief be, to be able to enter the inner court and steal the Empress’s things without anyone knowing?’

‘Moreover, the Empress remained very alert even while asleep. She kept her sword by her side. She would notice any small sounds. If they could steal without alerting anyone then there’s no way this case can be solved. Further, if the thief was so skilled, what were they thinking stealing clothes, instead of sneaking into the Empress’s warehouse?’

Castell looked at the Empress. He hesitated for a moment before suggesting, “I think that it was an inside job.”

“Oh?” The Empress slightly raised her eyebrow then smiled and said, “What do you think happened then, Castell? Let me hear your opinion.”

Castell looked at Alice, who was next to the Empress, and Alice looked back at him with a degree of disbelief in her eyes. If anything, it was strong suspicion. Alice seem to share Castell’s thoughts; or rather, the idea pointed to himself as being the most suspicious.

“Your Majesty, I think that there is no way the Valkyries would have let someone enter. Safety in the inner court is guaranteed. Nobody from the outside would come in to steal...”

“You mean to say that someone from among us stole the items then?” The Empress looked at him with a smile then leaned into her chair and asked, “How did they steal my clothes then? Also, who can touch my clothes? Castell, are you suspecting yourself?”

Precisely.

Since it was an insider job, Castell was most worth suspecting. Castell, himself, struggled to defend himself as he was the only one who could touch Her Majesty’s clothes. Alice looked at Castell. She had a raging urge to incriminate him and butcher him right away.

Castell looked at the Empress and sincerely explained, “No, Your Majesty, it was not me. Your Majesty, what you lost was your gloves. It is spring now, though. I have not touched your gloves, and I have not washed your gloves. Further, I have never touched the clothes of the court ladies.”

Alice looked at him coldly and said, “But you’re the only male that would be interested female clothing.”

However, the Empress cut her off. She looked at Castell and with an odd smile, said, “Castell, you investigate the incident. I’ll leave it to you. Go and find out who exactly stole my stuff. Consider it a chance to clear your, name too.”

“Your Majesty, do you trust me?”

“I do.” The Empress looked at him with a smile. She added, “Of course I trust you. However, I need the others to trust you too.”

Castell went down on one knee, raised his head and firmly said, “I have a request then, Your Majesty.”

“Oh? Tell me.”

The Empress appeared to be a little interested. She sat straight up and looked at him.

Castell didn’t hesitate to request, “If I complete this job, I hope to receive a reward from you.”

The Empress hesitated for a moment. She then revealed a calm smile, then put one leg over the other and responded, “All right, you have my word. Once

you find out the truth, I shall reward you with something of mine.”

“As you command!”

Ch. 04

Reward at Sixteen Years Old (Part 2)

The young man didn't enact some sort of detective story, because he was only allowed to investigate the incident. He wasn't told to have a day off of work. Hence, the young man still had to fulfil his daily duties. The duties of a personal attendant aren't simple. He was what connected Her Majesty to the entire Royal Palace. Without him working, everyone beneath them wouldn't know what she wanted, and she wouldn't be able to get what she wanted. Being a qualified attendant meant he had to be good at delivering information and things.

As such, if the young man wanted to find clues on the incident, he had to make time outside of his schedule to figure it out.

At present, the only thing he has been able to figure out was that it was an inside job, as it was impossible for someone to enter the inner court to steal. It was absolutely impossible. It's impossible for someone from outside to come in and steal given the loyalty of the Valkyries and how vigilant Her Majesty is.

Furthermore, the thief didn't steal anything valuable. All the thief stole was some clothes. And if it was only gloves and head cloths that were stolen.

'Would a creep be satisfied with just that? In other words, was the thief not trying to satisfy their own creepy desires?'

Only court ladies were inside the Empress's inner court. They wouldn't steal their own stuff. And forget the Valkyries stealing, that's impossible. They would be better off killing themselves because their end would be worse than death if they were discovered. Subsequently, the most suspicious person was himself.

But he definitely did not steal. He knew that best.

'So who was it? The clothes couldn't have grown themselves a pair of legs and ran off now, could they? The Empress didn't suffer any injuries or losses this time. It doesn't seem as though she wants to bother herself with it, because surely she understands that as opposed to saying they were stolen, it would be

more correct to say they were lost. Nobody had any reason to steal those things, so...'

'Nobody stole them?'

Castell, who was carrying the Empress's clothes, stood on the path. He looked at her uniform in his hands. Then his eyes drifted onto the lines on her clothes, and he spaced out. Her Majesty just wore this set of clothes last night. It still had her sweet scent on them.

He spaced out as he looked at Her Majesty's clothes. He stood there under the sun, as he quietly pondered to himself. He had an urge to sniff the scent on her clothes. Like an infatuated man, he raised her clothes up to his nose and buried his face in them.

"What the hell am I doing?!" He asked himself.

Castell swiftly came back to his senses and quickly yanked his arm down, nearly causing Her Majesty's clothes to drop. He looked at the clothes in his hands as though he just returned from a dream and felt his face burn up. He cursed himself in his mind. He couldn't believe he did that with her clothes.

He basically tarnished Her Majesty. She had him sort out her clothing because she trusted him yet he went and did that as if he was a dog...

'Wait...'

'Like a dog...'

At dinner, the Empress bit her spoon and looked at the meat stew in front of her with a bored look. Castell stood behind her and waited for her to finish her dinner.

"Castell."

"Yes, Your Majesty?"

The Empress put her spoon into the soup and then put one leg over the other. She rested her chin on her hands and looked at Castell with a teasing smile. She tilted her body and asked, "Castell, have you found any clues on the thievery incident?"

Castell looked at her smiling face and hesitated for a moment before replying,

“Yes. I have found the perpetrator.”

The Empress froze up for a moment before quickly revealing a smile indicating she'd found something fun. She leaned her body forward with a smile, and her chest jiggled dangerously. She looked at Castell with a serious look and asked, “All right then. Tell me, who's the audacious individual who stole my gloves and the court ladies' clothes?”

“Troy.”

Castell looked at her and responded seriously. He then picked up the paper bag from the side he had prepared. Inside were the court ladies' missing head cloths and Her Majesty's gloves. They were all wrinkled and had the dog's paw prints on them. The Empress froze up and then picked up her gloves in front of her, which was now wrinkled, and took a look. She then laughed aloud with her body moving along. She slumped onto the table and continued laughing.

“Oh my... Oh my... That's just hilarious... I never thought... I never thought it was my dog... I never thought it was my Troy. Come, come, come, Troy.”

The Empress clapped her hands. Troy, who was in the corner of the dining hall, ran over and leapt into her arms. She hugged Troy and then gently stroked his fur. She affectionately giggled and then said to Troy, “If you wanted them, you could've just told me. Why did you go and steal the court ladies' head cloths?”

Troy didn't reply, which was by all accounts understandable. Castell, however, hesitated for a moment before saying, “Your Majesty, I can understand what Troy was thinking...”

“Oh? You can understand what a dog is thinking?” The Empress giggled and then turned to face him with Troy in her arms. She stroked his fur and continued asking, “So then, tell me, why did Troy steal my gloves the court ladies' head cloths?”

Castell answered, “I would presume that it was most likely because he was jealous, for you rewarded your court ladies, but not him. Troy must've felt jealous, and therefore, stole their rewards and something such a head cloth for himself, since Troy, too, wants to be loved by you. That would be why he stole.”

The Empress laughed and then lowered her head to stroke Troy's head. Troy moaned comfortably and leaned onto Her Majesty's tummy and snored. The Empress continued to stroke his head with an affectionate and loving gaze as if she was looking at her own son.

"Jealous?"

Her Majesty softly repeated it and then looked up at Castell. She revealed a mischievous smile and asked, "Castell, is the reason you can understand Troy, because you, too, want a reward? Are you jealous that I haven't given you anything?"

"Mm..."

Castell didn't know how to reply, so he stood in place with a blank look. The Empress laughed when she saw his unsettled expression. She then took off the ring on her finger. She knocked on his forehead and placed it into his hand.

"This is a ring my husband gave me. It's not worth money, but it has been with me for many years. It's a very cherished item of mine."

The Empress placed the ring in Castell's hand with a smile. She then tilted her head. With smile, she asked, "Now you don't need to be jealous, right?"

Castell looked at the ring in his hand and spaced out. He looked at the Empress's smiling face, and Troy looked at him with a tinge of jealousy in his eyes.

The dog died from illness one year later.

In a rare moment, Her Majesty cried when she mourned his death.

However, she didn't need to raise a dog after a decade later.

Ch. 05

Castell looked at the ring in his hand with a blank look. It was a very simple ring without any pattern on it. It was the simplest ring you could find. As a matter of fact, it was so small that it was pitiful. It was akin to a wedding gift a penniless man would give his wife, but this ring had been exposed to all sorts of hardships. Her Majesty had never removed the ring from her finger. He looked at the ring in his finger and saw a faint flame emitted from it. The young man couldn't sleep as he looked at the reflection from the ring.

"This is the ring my husband gave me..."

'This is what Her Majesty's husband gave her...?'

Castell looked at the ring and spaced out. The young man's heart was comparable to a lake in spring creating warm ripples. This must be the ring that carries Her Majesty's husband's love.

'Is Her Majesty suggesting the same implicit meaning to me? No, no, no, I can't do this. I can't. I can't have any crooked thoughts for Her Majesty. '

"Your Majesty, what do you think of Castell?"

The Empress looked up from a pile of documents to look at Alice who wore a stern expression. The Empress touched her forehead and with a smile, replied, "What's wrong? You're looking at me so seriously, Alice."

Alice replied in a serious tone, "I noticed that you had given Castell your ring. I want to know what you think of Castell."

"I don't think my opinion of Castell affects anything, does it?"

The Empress lowered her head again. She didn't seem to care about the subject and had no desire to respond to the question. Perhaps the question was meaningless to her compared to the pile of documents before her.

"Your Majesty, it may not have anything to do with you, but it is very important for the inner court. Today, you rewarded Castell with something you always kept on you, and it was such an important item, too. That sort of item is a very sensitive thing for the inner court."

The Empress looked up at Alice with an expression of interest and asked, "What do you want to know then?"

"I just want to know how you see Castell."

The Empress thought about it for a moment then placed her pen down on the table. She went to sit on the bed and then lay down. She looked at Alice who was serious and nodded. She indifferently replied, "I like him."

Alice froze up. She hesitated before asking, "You... like him?"

"Yes. He adapted to his work in less than a month. He's got my life organised well, doesn't say much and is quick-witted, so it's a given that I like him."

The Empress calmly smiled and asked, "And he's my personal attendant. Why would I have kept him as my personal attendant if I don't like him?"

Alice looked at the Empress and seriously asked, "So you are fond of Castell?"

Alice's question caught the Empress off guard. The Empress stroked her long-black hair and then asked with a smile, "Is it so important if I am fond of him or not?"

"Of course it is. Your Majesty, we, who serve in the inner court, are the same as your dog, Troy." Alice looked at the Empress with absolute seriousness. She sighed and then elaborated, "It is a very sensitive topic for us. For us, we rely on your love to live. If we have lost your favour then we have lost our foundation. Therefore, we care very much about who you favour, and we are also very sensitive about it. We got really bothered when you gave Castell that ring today."

The Empress smiled and then rolled over to look at the mantle of the bed overhead. She responded, "You guys are strange. So now I have to pay attention to your feelings, in addition to paying attention to the power balance between the vassal states?"

"What we want to know now is if you favour Castell. If you favour Castell, Castell will be your favoured vassal. If you favour Castell, his status in the palace will be completely reversed. At present, he is just a servant nobody cares about. But after you decide to favour him, he will become someone everyone will try to ingratiate themselves with."

“I never considered that. However, I promised to give Castell a reward. That’s why I gave Castell the ring. The ring isn’t my most important one. I’ve already lost my most important ring.” The Empress looked at Alice with a slightly lonely expression. She laughed in a soft tone and then went on, “I never thought about favouring Castell. I don’t have a favoured vassal, either. Castell is just a personal attendant to me.”

“I see.” Alice let out a sigh of relief. She then looked at the Empress and asked, “But in that case, Castell will be leaving soon, right? He has been your personal attendant for a year. What job do you intend to have him take on next year?”

“Huh?” The Empress paused for a moment then stood up and asked, “Why? Why didn’t I know there was such a rule?”

“Castell will be seventeen next year. How can a man that has come of age be your personal attendant? If you were a man and Castell was a woman, then there would be no problems. However, you are without a spouse, Your Majesty. If you have a man who has come of age as your personal attendant, then there will definitely be rumours. That will negatively impact your image to a great degree. We cannot allow a man that has come of age to be your personal attendant; therefore, you must prepare to switch him out for a new personal attendant.”

“I don’t care about that sort of stuff!”

The Empress scrubbed her head with slight frustration. She exclaimed, “Just what are these rules? Let them gossip to their heart’s content. I know myself best. And not only do I have a husband, I even have a kid. How could I possibly lust for a child?! Their gossiping is all rumours.”

“Rumours are very frightening. Your Majesty, you may not be guilty; you may have a husband and child, but they do not know that. I think it would not be so bad for Castell to remain as your personal attendant once you have found your child. At present, though, you must maintain your image as the Empress. You cannot allow negative news about you to spread as a consequence of this matter.”

Alice looked at the Empress with a stern look and continued, “Further, Castell

is just a Valkyrie to you, right? You only saved him. I think that you could have as many personal attendants as you liked, so less Castell is no big deal.”

The Empress nodded. She silently looked at the documents on her desk. She then smiled bitterly and replied, “It seems that my life is never stable... I have a child and yet am forced to be separated from him. As soon as I established the empire, all sorts of troubles arose. As soon as I got a personal attendant, I have to swap him for another.”

“Those things cannot be helped, Your Majesty. It is precisely because you are the most outstanding person in this world that you have to deal with the most troubles. Nevertheless, Your Majesty, no matter what happens, you will be the Empress for sure. I promise you that as long as I am alive, nobody shall threaten your throne. I will allow nobody to. I will also inspect everyone around you. I will not allow a single traitorous vassal to appear!”

Alice looked at Her Majesty with a tense look. Her gaze was filled with fanaticism and determination. The Empress looked back at her. She stroked her head while smiling and then softly said, “I see... I feel assured then...”

Ch. 06

Castell woke up very early the next day. He carefully used a string to make a necklace out of the ring, which he hung off his neck. He let it dangle down to his chest, so that his heart beats, warmth and the ring could be placed together. That way, the most important gift Her Majesty gave him could be together with his most important thing. His life and Her Majesty's reward are equally important. In fact, he viewed Her Majesty's gift with more importance than his life.

He entered the inner court. Today's work had just begun. He was in a particularly good mood, since he received a gift, which was Her Majesty's most cherished item. As a matter of fact, he was excited. He was determined to carry out his work well today. He had to do everything for Her Majesty.

But honestly, he had always been doing so.

"Is that you, Castell?"

Somebody called out to him before he could drop off Her Majesty's breakfast and clothes, but he didn't see anyone along his line of sight. He stopped, though. He then lowered his head respectfully and said, "Miss Alice, do you have business with me? If you do, please make it quick. I need to hurry and deliver Her Majesty her food."

Alice nodded and sternly said, "Ah, go and deliver Her Majesty her stuff then come to the break room to see me."

"All right."

Castell nodded and then hurried to the Empress. He knocked on the door then pushed the door open and placed breakfast on the table. The Empress had woken up long ago and was going over the briefing for today's conference. It seemed to be about the five nations of the desert to the South. Castell didn't look into it too much. He made a small bow and notified her, "Your Majesty, I have brought today's breakfast."

"Uhm. Got it. Leave it there."

The Empress replied casually and lazily. It seemed that her attention was focused on the documents in front of her. Castell didn't say anything superfluous, as he didn't want to disturb her thinking. He made a small bow and prepared to leave.

"Ah, Castell, what job do you want?"

When he reached the door, the Empress spoke out to him. He paused before turning around to look at the Empress with confusion. The Empress placed the document in her hand down then brought breakfast over and slowly tore the meat and bread apart. She waited for Castell's response.

"Your Majesty, what do you mean?"

The Empress looked up at a confused Castell and then chuckled. She explained, "I asked what sort of job you want to do. Anything is fine, be it inside the palace or outside. You can even open a store if you want. You can live how you want. I'll satisfy you. If you don't want to work, I can give you money to go off and live your life. You can choose a location and find a house."

"Sorry, Your Majesty... I... I do not know... Is my... Is my job not being your personal attendant?"

Castell had no idea what the Empress was saying. His mind was blank. He wasn't afraid. He was just at a complete loss for what to do, because he didn't know what he could do without Her Majesty.

'Aren't I Her Majesty's personal attendant? What job do I want? I want to serve at Her Majesty's side as her personal attendant until the day I die.'

The Empress looked at him and put one leg over the other. She smiled and replied, "That's why I want to know what you want to do if you're not my personal attendant. Ah, I must've confused you. I guess it's understandable. The question was too sudden. You never thought about it, right? But, you should think about it. Do you remember the elder who brought you here? You need to consider your life in the future."

Castell nodded with puzzlement. He never thought about that. For him, serving as Her Majesty's personal attendant was what he intended to do for a lifetime. He had never thought about what he could do without Her Majesty.

Her Majesty gave him his life. His purpose in life was given to him by her. What exactly could he do without her?

He had never considered it. He had never considered what he could do without the Empress. If there came a day where he couldn't serve as her personal attendant, then that must be the day he leaves this world.

Castell bowed and then left the room. He didn't think about the question again, for the answer was the same regardless of how much he thought about it. He remembered that Alice called him to her break room, so he headed to over. He passed by a few Valkyries on the way there. He met with their eyes and nodded in a friendly manner before passing by.

"Ah, you're here, Castell."

As soon as he pushed open the door to the small break room, he saw Alice sitting on a bed kicking her feet as a child with nothing to do would. She held a cup of tea with steam coming from it. A cup of tea was placed on the table to the side. Castell walked over. He sat down on the chair and picked up the tea cup.

"Miss Alice, do you have business with me?"

Alice looked at him and in a serious tone asked, "I do. I wanted to ask you what you wanted to do after you are no longer Her Majesty's personal attendant."

"That... Her Majesty has asked me... Did you discuss it with Her Majesty?" Castell smiled helplessly then had a sip and continued, "If it is about this, my answer is the same. I have never considered it. I do not know how to answer the sudden question."

Alice looked at him and responded, "You need to think about it properly, Castell."

"I will deliberate it when I have time. Thank you for the reminder. However, I need to go and prepare other things now. Please pardon me. I will be taking my leave now."

Castell wasn't brushing it off. He really did have other business to attend to. Her Majesty had to go to the conference chamber soon; hence, he had to go

and see if the chamber was ready, as well as organise the order the vassals entered the chamber.

Alice didn't mind him or keep him as though that was all she wanted to speak to him about. There was no "so..."

Castell stood up and placed the tea he only had one sip of down on the table. He apologetically bowed to Alice and then walked to the entrance.

"Castell, it's worth deciding conscientiously. You only have this one chance."

"Yes. I am not acting carelessly."

Alice called out to Castell from behind while he gave a calm response. Alice didn't hop off the bed. While seated on the bed she sternly said, "You don't have much time left, after all. You have less than a year left at Her Majesty's side, after all."

"What are you saying...?"

"Your life as Her Majesty's personal attendant will be over in less than a year."

Ch. 07

“Not because you did something wrong or because Her Majesty hates you, but purely because Her Majesty shouldn’t have an adult male by her side looking after her. Her Majesty still sees you as a kid which is why she can behave without any misgivings around you. Would she be getting changed in front of you, otherwise?”

Castell sluggishly listened to Alice’s explanation. His whole mind was blank. He didn’t have a single counterargument. He couldn’t come up with a single reason to retort Alice, who was in front of him, explaining the situation to him. He had no way of taking back his position at Her Majesty’s side.

He had no way of escaping his age. In the past, he told himself countless times that he would be able to obtain power once he came of age, or maybe he never considered if he was a kid or an adult. It was the first time he was cornered by someone due to his age. He had the courage to deal with all of Her Majesty’s problems for her, but he had no way of overcoming this problem.

“So choose a profession that suits you. That way, you’ll be able to continue living well even if you leave Her Majesty. As for Her Majesty, you don’t need to worry.”

Alice gave Castell a shove and then went on, “Shouldn’t you head off to the conference chamber now? Don’t just stand here, then. Hurry and head over. While you might only have to work as Her Majesty’s personal attendant for one more year, you still need to ensure you do your job properly for the year, and leave a good impression with her.”

That day was a dark day as though the sky was grey all day for the young man.

His life had started changing. He was forgetting his depressing past. He thought he found his new purpose in life. He had found his master....

But only now did he realise that he was just a passer-by in Her Majesty’s life. For him, Her Majesty was his everything. But in Her Majesty’s eyes, he was just a little kid. He treasured the Empress’s reward more than anything and carried it with him, while Her Majesty was fine with abandoning him.

His life ended at the point he was no longer her personal attendant. Just last night, he made up his mind. He never expected that this day would come so soon. It has only been one year. It has only been one year, and yet, he has to leave Her Majesty already. What could he do without Her Majesty? Without Her Majesty, he was just a pitiful boy, a boy that was treated as a toy and messed with. That was all he was.

“Castell, have you decided yet?”

At night, the Empress lay on her bed and asked the young man before her again. Castell looked at her with a blank look. His lips trembled a few times and in his hoarse voice he stuttered, “Your Majesty... I... I... I only want to be your personal attendant... Without you, I do not know how to continue living... I... I will be conscious of when I appear... Please... I beg you... Please let me continue working as your personal attendant... Please...”

Castell knelt on the ground with his head pressed to the luxurious mat on the ground and sobbed.

The Empress didn’t say anything. Instead, she sat up from her bed with her blanket draped over her back. She looked at Castell and then extended her two slender legs. She gently stroked Castell’s head then put one leg over the other and said, “Rise, Castell. I can’t make the decision here. If I break the rules in the palace then it will be hard for me to enforce the rules in the future.”

“Your Majesty...”

“I honestly don’t hate you. I, actually, really like you. I’ve had several personal attendants, but I like you the most among all of them. Also, I don’t like you just because you’re a qualified personal attendant. I like you, solely because you are Castell.”

The Empress looked at him with a tinge of sadness and pity. Castell raised his head to watch the Empress lie back down. He looked at her with a blank look. That was the first time he heard someone say they liked him. It was the first time he was associated with the word “like,” and it came from the person he admired most.

“Your Majesty... I... I... I, too, like you!”

The Empress stayed silent for a while and then tilted her head to reveal a faint smile. Castell's entire body quaked, because what she said made him that tense. The Empress reached her hand out to give his head a gentle scrub. In a soft voice, she then replied, "I know, I know. I'm very happy that you like me, very, very happy."

"So... So..."

"But it's precisely because I like you that I can't let you continue being my personal attendant." Her Majesty cut him off. She looked at him and went on, "You're very similar to my son. If my son was as old as you, my son should look similar to you. I really like you, because of that. I've always viewed you as my son and liked you. But that's exactly why I can't let you be a personal attendant forever. Look around, Castell."

The Empress swept her arm around and with a smile, continued, "My territory is half of the continent, but the area I can move around in is only so much. I can only move about inside the palace. Back then, I could ride my horse across the entire continent, yet I can only move around in the palace now. I'm a caged bird right now. If you stay as my personal attendant, you'll only be able to live here forever. I don't want a young man, like you, to be locked in a cage, as well. You should soar in the vast sky."

"Your Majesty... I... I..."

"Castell, you want to only stay by my side right now, because I'm the only one by your side. Once you've met enough people and gotten acquainted with enough people, you will discover that this world isn't as small as the palace. You're very similar to my child. That's why I don't like to see you stuck by my side with no accomplishments."

"But...But... But I only wish to stay at your side! I only want to stay at your side to take care of you!"

"Honestly speaking, you're just a replacement for my son..."

"I do not mind! I do not mind even if that is the case! I do not mind how you see me.... Please... I beg you... Please let me stay at your side..."

Castell knelt on the ground with his face covered in tears. He looked as if he

was crying and shouting as he looked at Her Majesty. None of what Her Majesty just said meant anything to him. He just wanted to know if Her Majesty could keep him. As for what exactly he is, he didn't care even if she treated him as her dog.

The Empress looked at him. She looked at the young man's face of despair after he crumbled. Her expression jerked. She really had no way of rejecting him when he looked that way.

After a long silence on her side, she faintly said, "... Let me think about it."

She then pulled her blanket around and turned around to face her back to Castell...

Ch. 08

He wasn't sure what he himself wanted to do. More precisely, he didn't know anything other than being Her Majesty's personal attendant.

"I'm a caged-bird right now. If you stay as my personal attendant, you'll only be able to live here forever. I don't want a young man, like you, to be locked in a cage, as well."

That's what Her Majesty said to him.

He could understand that Her Majesty held him in high regard after he calmed down. Her Majesty genuinely didn't want for him to become a bird in a cage as she is. She certainly was a bird in a cage at the moment. She has such a huge world to fly around in and explore, yet she's stuck in this small palace, where she's relegated to looking to the North and spacing out. Her Majesty really wanted to go out. She had been separated from her family. She must really want to go and find them.

'A bird in a cage...?'

He looked at the ring Her Majesty rewarded him. She wore a very lonely expression when she referred to herself as a caged bird. He wondered if there was nothing he could do as her personal attendant. As her personal attendant, he was meant to work hard to make her happy.

'Is there nothing I could do for her?'

The wall in front of him once appeared so luxurious, yet it now resembled a cage made of gold.

He had no way of destroying the cage. He couldn't even stay inside the cage so how could he destroy it?

'Is looking at the Empress on the other side of the cage all I can do? Is watching the Empress, who I love, admire and like most, be stuck inside her cage looking up at the sky, hoping to spread her wings, all I can do? Her Majesty want for me to fly away, but how can I just watch Her Majesty suffer inside the cage?'

He didn't understand what Her Majesty was thinking, and he didn't want her efforts to go to waste. However, he couldn't do anything about it. He wanted to stay by Her Majesty's side even if he was a caged bird and even if he could never leave. He just wanted to stay by Her Majesty's side!

He just wanted to stay by Her Majesty's side, even if it was hell.

When the sun came up the next day, the young man was already on his feet and dressed. He faced the mirror and adjusted his clothes. His expression was particularly serious this time as though he was looking at his nirvana. Perhaps it was death that he was looking at. He gave the ring on his hand a gentle kiss, and then carefully placed it in front of his chest.

He used his body heat to warm up the cold metal.

He went to the kitchen to pick up Her Majesty's breakfast. Her breakfast consisted of fruits and cherry tomatoes this time. Castell looked at the moist fruits and froze up. Her Majesty secretly ate cherry tomatoes behind her black veil when he first came before her. The reward he got at sixteen was a little sour. He would never forget the taste of that fruit.

"There won't be any more cherry tomatoes after as they'll be out of season. This must be the last time Her Majesty eats cherry tomatoes."

His story at sixteen years old started with a cherry tomato, and the cherry tomatoes for the year ended here.

He carried Her Majesty's breakfast to her room. She was already awake. He placed the food down in front of her. She raised her head up. Her bright morning face was brighter and warmer than the sun. That was the brightest light the young man had seen in his life. His sentimental throat budged. He sincerely and abruptly said, "Your Majesty, I do not want to leave."

The Empress lingered for a moment then smiled. She responded, "Are you still talking about that? Didn't I already explain to you that I needed to think about it?"

"No, that is not what I mean, Your Majesty. I want to stay at your side under another post. I am okay with being a cleaner in the inner court if not your personal attendant. A chef would do, too, as long as I can stay by your side."

Her Majesty stood up. She touched his head and with a soft chuckle, replied, “Didn’t I explain that if you stay here, you will be stuck here forever. You’re still young, Castell, you haven’t seen this world. If you stay in the inner court forever, your horizons will only ever be so much. This world is truly very beautiful. Castell, if you can’t go and see it, you will regret it.”

“You are my entire world! I do not know how beautiful this world is! But I believe that it cannot be more beautiful than you!”

Castell raised his head up. That was the first time he looked right into the Empress’s eyes. Their eyes met. Her Majesty lingered for a moment. It had been a long time since she had seen someone else’s eyes. The young man’s eyes were firm as iron in that moment. His eyes carried persistence one at his age wouldn’t usually have. She dawdled for a moment and then chuckled softly. She extended her hand out to rub the young man’s cheek and softly said, “I’m very happy. Really. I’m very happy.”

“I... I do not mind being a caged bird... as long as I can stay by your side... And I do not want to see you become a caged bird. I want to let you feel comfortable in your cage, too...”

His courage vanished into thin air with Her Majesty’s touch. His heart started to beat faster. His face started to burn up. It wasn’t because of Her Majesty’s hands, but because of his instinctual shyness.

Her Majesty laughed as she looked at the young man before her. She gave his head a gentle rub then tilted her head and declared, “Make this cage more comfortable...? Castell, that’s some big talk... Not even I have the confidence I can do it. Make my cage more comfortable? I’m very happy. Honest. If you can do it, go for it. Let me see how you make my cage more comfortable.”

Castell looked up at Her Majesty’s smile with a baffled look. The young man was filled up like a pumped up balloon by her smile. Her smile was fluffier than a cloud. It was as if he was looking at the brightest treasure in the world. But nonetheless, it was true that Her Majesty’s smile was the most precious treasure to the young man.

“You want some?”

The Empress picked up a cherry tomato from the side and took a bite while

she shared the rest with Castell.

The last cherry tomatoes he had when he was sixteen were a little too sour. Inside was a fair sweet taste. They even tasted a little salty, similar to tears...

It was vastly different to the first cherry tomato he received...

The scariest part about being a caged bird isn't being in a cage, but not having a companion. He might not be able to be Her Majesty's personal attendant, but he wanted the opportunity to be able to stay by her side. She allowed him to stay by her side. She allowed the young man to have his stubborn request.

That is why the young man continues to forge forth in the snow and winds towards that illusion in front of him. Despite being surrounded by darkness and turbulence, the young man felt that where Her Majesty was, was clear bright light...